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Harding, Warren G. G. Harding, Pres. U. S., 1885-1923

ADDRESS
OF THE
PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES

AT

YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA

October 19, 1921, at 10 a. m.

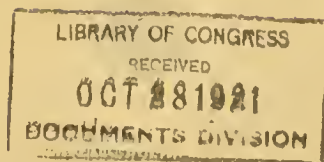


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REMARKS AT YORKTOWN, OCTOBER 19, 1921.

FELLOW AMERICANS: The name of old Yorktown has ever held for Americans a significance unlike that of any other name in our annals. On this historic peninsula were conducted major operations in our struggle for independence and our war for national unity. A few miles away, across the river, was made at Jamestown the first permanent settlement of our race on this continent, while your historic Yorktown itself was one of the very earliest settlements.

Here, an hundred and forty years ago to-day, Washington accepted the surrender which meant at last the freedom of the colonies, the establishment of national independence, the assurance of this great experiment in popular government which we have since conducted. Here came the victory which answered the colonial aspirations, but which left them spent and confused in the chaos of their triumph. Here came the great turning point in history, old world and new, which first revealed that freedom needed the agencies for its preservation. The marvel is not that the war had succeeded; the stupendous thing is that out of varying conditions, conflicting ideas, and threatening jealousies the victors were able to unite in laying the foundations on which we continue to build with full confidence to-day. Surely a God-given destiny must have inspired and an Infinite hand assisted in directing.

It is easy to become enthralled in a retrospective and reverent reverie. One may recall the bitter years of revolutionary struggle, with varying hopes and fears and the incalculable sacrifices involved, and yet with that unconquerable resolution which must remain the priceless heritage of the republic. It is difficult to compare the glow of triumph, but in the retrospective view we may bring ourselves to a new sense of realization and appreciation, and we may and do appraise the exalted patriotism, the unfaltering leadership, the unlimited devotion, and the unfailing courage which made Washington truly the Father of his country. More, we get a new and more grateful estimate of all the heroes who suffered and sacrificed in the

immortal struggle, and we have a new reverence for the lofty statesmanship which began the temple of an abiding republic.

It is good to dwell in the atmosphere of historic Yorktown and to recall the lessons of the immortal Washington, because our own feelings of devotion are thereby emphasized. We would not wish ours to be other than a forward-looking republic, but we will fail in coming to the supreme fulfillment if we do not recall the beginning, and the unalterable foundation on which we have builded.

Washington's straggling and decrepit army of a well-nigh exhausted cause, had been operating before New York, hundreds of miles away. The enemy, controlling the seas, had undertaken a campaign here in the Old Dominion, to separate North from South, to reconquer Virginia, and to break the back of the Confederation. But there was never a chance to separate Virginia from the cause of freedom. Washington knew it, and with the unerring eye of his calm genius, saw his opportunity to end the long struggle. His campaign of Yorktown testified a military talent not second to any which history has recorded. Almost before the enemy suspected his plan, Washington had achieved the seemingly impossible feat of transferring his army four hundred miles to this peninsula; had invested Yorktown, and consolidated here the forces of the colonies North and South, and of their great ally, France, both on land and sea. So rapid was the operation that almost before the enemy force had sensed its danger the French and American troops had stormed the outer works of Yorktown and forced a situation which left only surrender to the British.

One seeks in vain for a parallel to this campaign, and the importance of the victory to the contending colonies long since has been surpassed by its importance to the world, because its paean of victory was the morning song at the dawn of a new era in freedom, made secure in popular government.

We must not claim for the New World, certainly not for our colonies alone, all the liberal thought of a century and a half ago. There were liberal views and attending sympathy in England and a passionate devotion to more liberal tendencies in France. The triumph of freedom in the American colonies greatly strengthened liberal views in the Old World. Inevitably this liberal public opinion, deliberate and grown dominant, brought Great Britain and America to a

policy of accommodation and pacific adjustment for all our differences. There has been honorable and unbroken peace for more than a century, we came to common sacrifice and ensanguined association in the World War, and a future breach of our peaceful and friendly relations is unthinkable. In the trusteeship of preserving civilization we were naturally arrayed together, and the convictions of a civilization worthy of that costly preservation will exalt peace and warn against conflict for all time to come.

Our thoughts have lately been concerned with those events which made history on the scale of a world, rather than of a continent. Yet the lesson is the same. It is the lesson of real interdependence among the nations which lead civilization.

In our great crisis, nearly a century and half ago, France came to our aid and made our independence possible. In her supremely anxious hour we gladly went to her support and did our part to secure her liberty. A grateful Republic fulfilled an obligation which the passing generations had not dulled.

Reflecting to-day on the inevitableness of our participation, on our ties of kinship, friendship, and fellowship, and appraising anew the way the world—God's good world—must share the aspirations to realize the noblest ideals for mankind, there is a fresh hungering for understanding, a new call for cooperation, a clear conviction of purposes and devotions and loyalties not limited to sovereignties nor national boundaries. As the fortunate, successful citizen is both inspiration and example to the community of his growth, so must the fortunate and successful nations help the world to the higher and nobler levels of accomplishment. Here at Yorktown was sealed the charter of the new and free America, but in the charter was written the rational liberalism of the maturing eighteenth century crying out from both continents.

Shall mankind, then, go on yet for generations, for centuries, knowing but refusing to be guided by these truths? Not if conscience and reason are properly asserted. I believe the time is come when there must be recognition of essential cooperation among nations, devoted, each of them in its own peculiar national way, to the common good, the progress, the advance of all human kind. Let us hope that we stand at the dawn of a new day, in which nations shall be stronger for contribution to the world's betterment, because each

will feel the assurance of common purpose and united aspiration, and the security of a common devotion to the ends of peace and civilization.

One need not picture a world-sovereignty, ruling over all the varying races, traditions, and national cultures, because it will never be. That would mean a social, institutional, and intellectual standardization, utterly inharmonious with the plan that filled the world with differing peoples, civilizations, and purposes. No program which seeks to submerge nationality will succeed. This Republic will never surrender so priceless a heritage, will never destroy the soul which impelled our gratifying attainments. In the sober circum-spection, retrospection and introspection of these crucial times we do believe there is sanity and urgent need in bringing the best thought of all great peoples into understanding and cooperative endeavor which shuns the alliances in arms and strengthens the concords of peace, so that each may realize its rightful destiny and contribute its utmost to human advancement and attending human happiness.

The heroes of the revolution little knew, the founding fathers little realized, Washington himself little dreamed the tremendous significance of the beginning which was wrought amid their heroic sacrifices. But if we could summons their spirits this morning I am sure they would rejoicingly marvel at the Republic we have builded. They would sanction, as do we of Virginia and Ohio, and as do all the States with shining stars in the field of blue, the riveted reunion where disunion threatened, and they would acclaim with us the nationality which has made the victory at Yorktown a surpassing expression of human progress. They would have us cling to independence, regnant with constitutional government at home, mindful of interdependence, and unafraid before the world.





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